



## Step Up to Quality Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is Step Up to Quality?

Step Up to Quality is the title of the Nebraska Early Childhood Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Nebraska is one of over 40 states with an early childhood quality rating and improvement system.

### 2. What is a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)?

A QRIS is a defined method to evaluate, support and improve the level of quality in early childhood care and education settings. A QRIS includes quality standards, supports and incentives for meeting the quality standards, monitoring and accountability systems, and a rating system that identifies the level of quality of a program or provider.

### 3. Why does Nebraska have the Step Up to Quality QRIS?

Nebraska policy makers believe it's important to support child care centers, family home providers and early childhood education programs that offer the highest quality care and education to children of Nebraska.

### 4. Which programs or providers are eligible to participate in Step Up to Quality and how do I get started?

Programs eligible to participate in Step Up to Quality include Head Start and Early Head Start Programs, Licensed Child Care Programs, Family Home Child Care Providers, and Public School Early Childhood Programs.

All programs participating in Step Up to Quality need to apply. Programs complete an on-line application in the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.

<http://ecrecords.education.ne.gov/homepage.aspx>

Programs that apply and complete the Orientation Training will be rated at Step 1. These programs will be recognized for meeting child care licensing standards around health and safety as the foundation of quality.

**5. Which providers and programs are required to participate in Nebraska Step Up to Quality?**

Licensed child care programs that received over \$500,000 in child care subsidy during the federal fiscal year 2011-2012 (October 1, 2011 - September 30, 2012) are required to complete an application before December 31, 2014 on the Step Up to Quality Professional Records System website .

Programs that received over \$250,000 in child care subsidy in federal fiscal year 2011-2012 will be required to complete an application in 2015 but are eligible to apply any time after July 1, 2014.

Required programs will not be eligible to continue their subsidy contract and may receive disciplinary action from the Department of Health and Human Services if they do not complete the application.

**6. If my program is not required in Year 1, but is required in Year 2 or Year 3 (according to #5 above), are we able to make an application earlier?**

Yes, programs that are required in Year 2 or Year 3 are eligible to apply any time after July 1, 2014.

**7. What if I choose not to apply for Step Up to Quality?**

Participation in Step Up to Quality is voluntary. (See Question 5 for required programs)

**8. Is there a cost to apply for Step Up to Quality?**

No, there is no cost to programs or staff to apply to participate in Step Up to Quality.

**9. If my program director chooses to participate (or is required to participate) in Nebraska Step Up to Quality, do I have to participate as an early childhood professional?**

Yes. All staff working directly with children in a Step Up to Quality program must participate so that the program application can be completed. Each staff member will need to enter information into the Early Childhood Professional Record System which is a new, on-line database for Step Up to Quality programs.

**10. What is the benefit for me as a family child care provider, center-based program or preschool?**

Quality ratings for all programs participating in Step Up to Quality will be made public in 2017. Those programs will be recognized by the Department of Education and Department of Health and Human Services indicating they are committed to providing high quality care and education to the children and families that they serve.

Participating programs may be eligible to receive quality incentive bonuses, higher child care subsidy rates, professional development and coaching services.

**11. I am the director of a program with multiple sites. Can I enter one application for all sites?**

Yes. If a program has multiple sites, you can complete an organization application. Additional sites can then be included in the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System.

<http://ecrecords.education.ne.gov/homepage.aspx> Each site must designate an on-site employee responsible for overseeing the Step Up to Quality process.

**12. What happens if I apply or my employer/director applies and doesn't move beyond Step 1?**

The primary emphasis and goal of a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) is on the "I" for improvement. Nebraska's QRIS, Step Up to Quality, will assist programs and provide you with resources and support to move through the Steps. If your program chooses to remain at Step One, the public rating will list your program at Step One.

**13. How will the families with children in programs or in child care know about my Step rating?**

The ratings will be made public in 2017. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services and Nebraska Department of Education are working together to develop a public information campaign to help parents understand what high quality child care and early childhood education looks like. These materials will highlight the various steps in Step Up to Quality and explain the criteria for each step.

**14. What if I choose not to apply for Step Up to Quality?**

Participation in Step Up to Quality is voluntary. (See Question 4 for required programs)

**15. How can a coach help me and/or my program?**

A coach is an Early Childhood Professional who guides a program or provider through the Step Up to Quality Process. The coach will assist with on-site training and observation and will provide feedback. The program director or administrator will use this information to set goals and develop strategies for program improvement. A coach will be assigned to a program during Step 2 if the program would like to receive coaching services.

**16. What if a program doesn't want a coach?**

As a program moves into Step 2, staff from the Step Up to Quality team will visit the early childhood program to determine if there is interest in having a coach. Coaching services are recommended to assist the program through the Step Up to Quality process. If the program receives support or coaching services from another agency they may choose not to receive coaching from the Department of Education. There is no cost to the program for a coach.

**17. What if I don't understand what the quality indicator means? How do I get help?**

We have staff ready to help! Feel free to call or email your questions to the Step Up to Quality Office. The toll-free phone number is 1-844-807-5712. The email address is [nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.stepuptoquality@nebraska.gov)

If you have an assigned coach, she/he would be happy to answer many of your questions.

### **18. How long will it take a program to go from Step 1 to Step 5?**

The amount of time it takes a program to move from Step 1 to Step 5 will vary depending on the program or provider. If a director or family child care home provider has already completed most of the licensing required trainings such as Safe with You, Management Training, Getting Down to Business, or the Early Learning Guidelines Domain series they can move through Steps 1 and Step 2 rather quickly. If a program is already accredited, they may have policies, procedures and documentation in place which may help them move forward. If program staff are familiar with the Environment Rating Scale observation tool or the CLASS observation tool they can help their program be better prepared for the on-site visit and observations.

### **19. What happens if the program had a Director/Owner change?**

Programs that participate in Step Up to Quality must have a professional record for the Director/Owner of the organization whether the Director oversees one or multiple sites. Both the organization and site director are known as the Director of Record.

Director/Owners of organizations and sites can change after the initial applications are completed. A Director of Record Change Form must be completed and submitted to the Nebraska Department of Education. The department will make the necessary change in the system. The form can be accessed on the Step Up to Quality website.

### **20. How does a child care or early childhood education program schedule a rating or observation for Steps 3-5?**

Programs must first complete the Step Up to Quality Rating Readiness Tool. The program will work with their coach (if they have one) to determine if they have the information in place that a rater or observer will need to see. The program can also determine if there are areas that they want to opt out of in their early observations. The application for a rating and/or observation is within the Step Up to Quality Rating Readiness Tool. The program will indicate the best three month window for the program observation and rating to occur.

### **21. How can I make this a successful experience?**

Focus on one Step at a time. Set priorities with your coach, and create a plan that will make sense for your program and your staff. The ultimate goal is to help the program improve quality. Each of your efforts will improve the services you provide.

### **22. Can I receive college credit for attending the Management Training Program?**

Yes, at this time Chadron State, Metropolitan Community College, Central Community College, Southeast Community College, and University of Nebraska at Kearney have agreed to continue to award college credit for this training. Contact the college from which you choose to earn credit to learn how credits will be assigned, what costs you will be responsible for, and to request college credit for this course.

**23. If I took the Management Training Program last year, can I apply for college credit now?**

No, you must apply for college credit before or during enrollment in the Management Training Program.

